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THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE
(UNOFFICIAL)

An organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

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W. P. A.

"Prosperity" may be here for some people. But WPA workers are being discharged from work, left to shift for themselves, or placed upon the barest kind of relief.

At Madison Square Garden, October 31st, President Roosevelt said, "We will provide useful work for the needy unemployed. We prefer useful work to the pauperism of the dole."—*Nation,* Dec. 12th. As part of his campaign for reelection the President committed himself to a continuance of WPA and opposed the policy of returning relief to the inadequate hands of states and localities. Since February 1936 about 775,000 workers have been cut from the WPA rolls, to take their chance between private employment and local relief.

Now the President proposes to put 600,000 more in this situation by June, according to the report given the House Appropriation Committee in secret session by Federal Relief Administrator Hopkins and recently made public. The monthly WPA expenditures are to be cut about one-third, from $151,000,000 to $103,000,000. This presents the nation with a social tragedy of the first order.

MORE MISERY

Unofficial estimates put the number of WPA workers who under this proposal will in the next few months flood the already overburdened relief rolls or further crowd the employment lines at 800,000.

Who Are They? Thousands of men and women who have been working on fine projects in city improvement, repairing and building, will be dismissed. Farmers will feel the blow. One county (Perkins, So. Dak.), reports that 670 have been laid off, leaving only 500 on the important work projects they had begun. The white collar workers are especially selected for the axe. A thousand actors are to be laid off (Pearson, in the January *Forum),* 800 artists, several hundred musicians. Administrators are to be reduced says Hopkins. The fine quality of leadership that has kept many art projects at their high level will be decimated.

Living Standards. Those who are able to get on relief will have their income cut from a $50 average per month to the relief average of about $25 per month. (Relief varies from $36 per family in New York to less than $10 in some southern states.—*Nation,* Jan. 16th.) A New York relief official told his pastor of the death of a man who had been cut from WPA. "He died of a broken heart; he couldn't face the family on relief again," was his explanation.

There is also the social menace of a possible cut in wages for those who stay on WPA rolls. The present rates give only a bare existence. This was done on the theory that there ought to be no inducement for men to leave or refuse private employment.

Some Reactions. The cuts that have been in process during the last few months have produced in several cities protest demonstrations, sit-down strikes, and the use of

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clubs and tear gas by the authorities. Similar situations are occurring in the farm areas. At Elk River, Minn., farmers are picketing the relief offices in protest. At Denison, Iowa, men, women and children who came from surrounding townships to ask the board of supervisors for provisions for their families and livestock were driven from the relief office by tear gas. Later a jury acquitted one of them charged with breaking a window and the brutal deputy sheriff was roundly condemned.

Can They Find Jobs? Although some men and groups argue that private industry can absorb the unemployed, yet it is not being done. While production increased 70.3% from Sept. '32 to Sept. '36, yet factory employment increased only 42.1%. But the number on relief has decreased only slightly. Relief rolls cannot be expected to decrease as rapidly as industry expands (findings of WPA Social Research Division) for these reasons:

Industry has two sources of supply—the employable people on relief, and those who are not on relief. It has been noted that employers are partial to the non-relief people, and where possible they have chosen the ones who have been idle the shorter time.

The demand is mainly for skilled and semi-skilled workers. But people on relief are quite often unable to meet this qualification. 75% of relief persons are unskilled.

The number of new workers, young people ready for jobs, is estimated conservatively at 600,000 per year.

The technological advance does not cease merely because there is great unemployment. Each year new machines come into industry which displace more and more workers.

Furthermore, those who do find jobs are likely also to find lower wages. The *New Republic* (Feb. 3rd) points out that these WPA dismissals will tend to depress general wage levels and to halt the march of recovery.

SOCIAL RETREAT

The American Way. WPA is the "American Way" of caring for the unemployed who are able to work. It is an effort to make work and provide jobs that will not conflict with private business. It undertook to engage the unemployed in useful work near their homes. In villages and country it often meant road building, drainage of swamps and carrying on measures to increase good health, recreation, and travel. WPA in some places built public buildings, sewers, sidewalks, and made extensive repairs. The work has been needed. Without WPA much of it would not have been done. WPA tried to bring together idle funds and idle men in order to produce socially useful construction, within the limitations of the profit system.

An Example. Probably no city in the United States has received a greater return from WPA than New York City. By its labor 48 miles of sewers were built, 33 miles of old track removed from the streets and resurfaced; many miles of new street surfaces laid; repairs and improvements made in public buildings of all kinds; two piers converted into lodging houses for homeless men; slums demolished; parks and playgrounds built; swimming pools dug; and the recreation field built on Randall's Island, with a stadium seating 30,000 people. Inspection of leaking plumbing fixtures saved a monthly total of 148 million gallons of city water. For the mosquito control work of the Department of Health marshes were drained, brush cut, and 282 miles of new ditches dug with 9 miles of drain pipes laid. An air pollution survey was made. Out of $176,581,489 spent in the first eleven months of operation $136,713,419 went for payroll, keeping nearly 170,000 persons at work directly and many more through their purchases.

Art By and For the People. In the unique Federal Arts project for writers, actors, artists and musicians, WPA has made an original and creative contribution to the cultural life of this nation. "Hunger is not debatable" for unemployed actors, painters, musicians and writers, says Harry Hopkins. Nor is it debatable, comments the *American Magazine of Art* (Aug. '36), that millions of Americans in city slums or small villages had never been able to enjoy the work of artists until the Federal projects made it possible. With 153 producing theatres in 28 states, presenting some of the very best plays possible, the masses of American people can enjoy good drama. January was scheduled to see 80 units open, each with a different premiere performance of an American play. Chicago was so well impressed with the quality and value of this work that the Park Department now furnishes the production materials, reducing government expense to only 1.7% above relief wage.

"Footlights, Federal Style." In an article under this title *(Harpers* Nov. '36) Irving Kolodin counts 12,500 in WPA Arts projects Number One—the Theatre, playing to a weekly audience of 500,000 of whom about 100,000 pay an admission fee.

It is a "functional theatre," he says, "in which plays are chosen because they represent something of significance both to the players and the audience . . ." "a theatre which has roots as well as branches, which bears fruit to sustain life as well as blossoms to ornament it." After 10 months the Director, Hallie Flanagan could report that in touring towns and villages never reached before by the theatre, a number of areas were developing regional theatres important enough to the life of the communities to become self-supporting. She concludes her article, "A Theatre for the People" *(American Magazine,* Aug. '36) by saying, "All over America artists are playing, acting, dancing and painting as they have never done before. Can we doubt that they will inevitably affect the pattern of American life and American art?"

They Want More. An amazing reception has been given the Theatre project by the rural and small town sections of America. A motorized unit plays in the backwoods towns of North Carolina. A group on the road played one night to a town in Nebraska of 1,000 population. 800 people crowded in to see the first dramatic presentation they had ever witnessed.

A survey made by the Public Use of Arts Committee brought in such a large number of requests for exhibits, murals, and such work, that "the potential results of an organized campaign to extend the use of the arts to the vast layers of our population which have always been outside their influence are breath-taking." (Ralph M. Pearson, the *Forum,* Dec. '36). Such diverse groups requested work as high school and public school teachers, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union, the Ministers Union, which requested murals showing the activities of progressive liberal churches; the Pullman Porters Union, the Transport Workers Union. Suggestions for murals in municipal subways of New York were unofficially approved by the Transit Commission.

Also Better Art. The 5,300 artists on WPA projects are doing far more than earn a meager living. They are painting and sculpturing an indigenous American art. Commenting on the last July exhibition of pictures and sculpture by WPA artists, the *American Magazine of Art* says, "Even critical observers saw in the Washington exhibit a vigorous answer to those who hold that the artists on relief should be handed a pick and shovel instead of the tools of their profession." In Tampa a violinist, after a concert by the Federal Music project said, "Do not judge what we can do a few months from now by our performance tonight; our hands are still too calloused for the bow. . . ." He went on to say that he had been recently employed on a road gang. "I'm afraid I made very bad roads, but once the callouses are off my hands I'm going to play as I never played before." A group of players in Jacksonville explain their fervor in performing "Saturday's Children" by saying, "We can act this play because we are all 'Saturday's Children'."

"The Works Progress Administration in the name of relief has had an amazing return of good art on its investment in the artistic resources of the American people," writes Margaret Marshall (the *Nation,* Sept. 5th). She points out the freedom under which the work is done, "the subject and technique of the artists working on the projects are not regimented . . . it is helping to make art and the artist an integral part of society."

The Artist's Point of View. "This work" (Treasury Dept. Art project of murals in public buildings) "is not addressed to esthetes who cherish the misunderstood. It is addressed to the community in general and like the art of all great periods it is objectively understandable. . . . This government art program is an epochal and a civilizing event. It is epochal because for the first time in our history forces have been set in motion which in the arts may radically alter the practical and vicarious flavor of American life. . . ." "The value of what has happened is so tremendous that to allow the program to be reduced instead of amplified would be a cultural calamity. Also, because avoidable, it would stand as a confession of cultural impotence in the face of a dominant materialistic creed which would shame us for a century to come."—Ralph M. Pearson, *Forum,* Dec. '36.

WHO DEMANDS THE CUTS?

Who is it that is bringing pressure to halt the valuable social projects of the WPA and thereby to bring misery to thousands of our fellow citizens?

Balance the Budget. Among the New Dealers of the Administration is a group which has stood consistently for balancing the budget. Hopkins, who knows the human and social consequences of the cuts, wants more money, not less, for WPA. In going

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with the economy group, the President is playing into the hands of the "economic royalists" and all who, like them, want taxes kept down regardless of the suffering that policy brings to others.

The Liberty League is the spokesman for these people. Its pamphlet "New Work Relief Funds" (April '36) wants relief expenditures reduced, taken away from the President and handed back to local and state authorities. Its pamphlet "Work Relief" (Nov. '36) is given the sub-title "A record of the tragic failure of the most costly governmental experiment in all world history." It argues that WPA expenditures do not stimulate capital goods industries, overlooking their effect upon consumers goods industries and what this leads to.

The Chamber of Commerce agrees in substance with the Liberty League's position and demands.

In every community there are those who regard WPA as unnecessary and want relief reduced to a starvation rate, or stopped altogether.

Thus the wealthy and the privileged invite from the pulpit the condemnation given by scripture to those who see their brethren in need and show them no compassion.

ARE CUTS NECESSARY?

For the Rich? At the same time that Congress is proceeding to cut WPA funds in response to the President's request, the daily press and the financial journals continue to report high profits, dividends, salaries and bonuses to those who own and control our economic machine. The Treasury Department's annual list of high incomes shows just as long a list from $10,000 to $500,000. Financial analysts agree that profits are going up faster than wages or employment. The *Wall Street Journal* (Jan. 15, 1936) finds that "Investment profits realized by persons filing income tax returns doubled in 1935 over 1934. It estimates the amount for 1935 at 504 millions as against 211 millions in 1934.

There would be no need to cut more than half a million of our citizens off from the satisfaction of working for a living, there would be no need to cripple the valuable social and artistic enterprises begun by WPA if the Administration were willing to adequately tax the beneficiaries of the profit system.

Still Senseless Luxury. Side by side with the meagerness of relief now being given, and proposals to cut still further, there can be seen lavish expenditures by the small wealthy class—"Handkerchiefs priced at $75, but the store will order better ones up to $200;" a report of a "demand for vanity cases at $1,200 to $1,400," and ladies' wraps of "mink and baum martin from $3,000 to $12,000; of the doll with a bride trousseau at $150."—*Economic Notes,* Labor Research Association.

Once again Dives is willing to give Lazarus only the crumbs. To save his taxes he is content to kill one of the most constructive social experiments of our history. *What are the followers of Jesus saying to him? What are they doing to offset his pressure upon the Administration and Congress? It is time to put reality into our words about the strong bearing the burdens of the weak.*

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M. F. S. S. FINANCES

Our January issue described our need of $2,500 more in pledges and contributions to meet our minimum budget. We have received only $408.75—far below the mark. Without the necessary $2,000 more it will be impossible to carry out our program.

Our forceful Field Secretary—your representative, Charles C. Webber—is now as far west as Illinois. Always, always, always the question is how much longer can he stay in the field. We hope he can stay full four months, going on to the Rocky Mountain States in March, and to the Pacific Coast in April. But there is one big IF — IF FINANCES PERMIT.

Please hold the dates May 4th, 5th and 6th open for our National Conference and Annual Meeting.

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